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STUDY PROJECT

LEADERSHIP -- ANALYSIS AND COMMENT

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HERBERT F. HARBACK
United States Army

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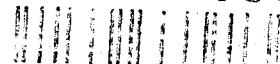
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The interview centered on General Rhame's "lessons learned" as he completes two thirds of his command tour and, more importantly, as his division does final preparations for deployment to Operation Desert Storm. The interview, lasting over 5 hours and resulting in over 100 pages of comment and self critique, was done for the Military History Institute and is maintained there as a part of the Chief of Staff, US Army, annual "Division Command Lessons Learned Program" document.

As a follow-on, two leadership articles were developed and accepted for publication. The first article, to be printed in Engineer magazine this summer, is entitled "Practical Leadership --The 20/80 Rule". Its thesis is that decision making should be reduced in time and energy to the point where there is always a net gain over the resources expended in the decision. The article discusses economic principles and applies them to propose a practical rule of thumb called the "20/80 rule" -- for 20% of one's decision making effort, one should expect a 80% completed result and that may be good enough for most decisions. To obtain the last 20%, to get a zero defect result, the decision maker may find himself consuming resources (time, energy, material, people and opportunities) in far greater amounts than what can be gained. The second article, "Can You Hear Me, Lieutenant?" will appear in the April issue of Engineer magazine. It provides a discussion of the frames of reference needed in the leadership development of a junior officer. Centered on 10 traits, the author discusses each and further condenses them into the three core leadership traits of caring, standards, and readiness.

Because of confidentiality, the interview transcripts are maintained at the Military Institute of History. Separate endnote listings are located at the end of each of the articles while a composite listing of bibliographies for the two articles is found at the end of the second article.

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LEADERSHIP -- ANALYSIS AND COMMENT

AN ORAL INTERVIEW AND ARTICLE PUBLICATION PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel(P) Herbert F. Harback
United States Army

Dr. J. W. Williams, PhD

Lieutenant Colonel Martin Andresen

Project Advisors

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U. S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

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PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP -- THE 20/80 RULE

FINE TUNING TO FAILURE

I guess it has bothered me for some time but I never could actually put my finger on it. I felt it each time I spent too much effort on a particular decision or project and missed doing something else I wanted to do or when I had to wait while others added their "finishing touches" to what I considered an already completed effort. It was the time when seemingly hour long minutes ticked by while my boss "fined tuned" a totally tuned issue. All I could think about was "why?" with my inner thoughts being "come on, all right, already!"

I am now convinced that one does not have to dot every "i", cross every "t," or proof every word when it comes to daily events. Decisions can be made without herculean data collection efforts; decisions can have blemishes. The costs are too high for an absolutely fail-proof, 100% on-target, type of decision making process. The "get me ALL the facts before I decide" way of doing business is just not practical leadership.¹

A FOCUS ON NET GAIN

Practical leadership requires a decision making style in which the end results are greater than the efforts expended. I call it "20/80 leadership." It simply means that for about 20% of your energy and resources, you should expect an 80% completion, and often that is close enough. To get that last 20% of accuracy, refinement and perfection, in other words, to get within a zero defect, total confidence level, you would have to commit enormous additional effort and expenditure of resources. The last 20% may cost up to four times more effort than did the first 80%!

I am totally convinced that the 20/80 leadership rule is a critical part of a successful leader. As a battalion commander, I would seek out the officer or NCO who, at the expense of other pressing missions, was continuously working on one issue just to get that action perfect. I would load that leader up with multiple demands until he finally realized that he had to "bring to closure" the one action in order to "get me off his back" on the other actions. The teaching point was that he could accomplish far more in the same amount of time just by making decisions at that 20/80 mark.

What I am saying is that pin point accuracy is not a normal

decision prerequisite; rather, one strives to get within a standard and then move on.² There is abundant truth to the adage that "an 80% solution is far better than a 100% idea". Sure, if time permits, one goes back and fine tunes, but do not count on it. Do it to standard with 20% of your effort the first time around. The object is to get within that "band of excellence"³, not to an absolute certainty mark. A more realistic mark in the corporate world is to be a little better than the competition; in the military, it is to have the edge over your enemy, to accomplish the mission and then move on. Implied is that one must not overdo it and hence, miss other waiting missions. The 20/80 rule tells you how to increase the number of successful decisions within a given amount of time.

Now, "20/80" does not mean accepting a half-right, half-wrong (in other words, half-baked) solution. Rather, it is a mindset of not spending a lifetime on one action at the expense of other actions. If you do encounter the "must be 100% perfect", zero defect, mission, I would recommend that you relook it with a critical eye. In most cases, relooking and redefining the issue into more basic terms will get you back within the 20%/80% boundaries for a forward moving decision. Likewise, "20/80" does not mean a lack of attention to detail. It is not a free ticket for sloppiness.

shortcuts, and excuses for failure. The concentration of effort within a shorter amount of time encourages a greater, not a lesser, amount of attention to detail.

"20/80" should be taken in the spirit of its intent, rather than its exact percentages. The number combination is based on my experiences and observations over the last twenty years and is secondary to the goal of obtaining the greatest number of acceptable results within a given time. Could 15%/85%, 30%/70% or 50%/50% be more accurate ratios? Perhaps, but if such a question is an issue, then I would say that you missed the point. In fact, one could make a case that this question just illustrates how quickly we can become bogged down on side issues.

There is a point where you stop, make it happen and then move on. That point, a point beyond which the leader's efforts in terms of his limited resources, most importantly time, become more costly than the incremental advantage gained, is where one must stop. General Edwin H. Burba Jr., past commander of the 7th Light Infantry Division and now commander of United States Forces Command, is clear in his opinion that a leader should not get so caught up in a decision that he finds himself myopically frozen on that one issue. The leader should gather sufficient assets within his control to accomplish his task and then move on.⁴ General

Burba is talking the 20/80 rule found in practical leadership. Don't seek perfection; rather, put in what needs to be put in to get the organization moving. The return on perfection's extra effort is going to be far more expensive than the potential gains.

THE ECONOMICS OF IT ALL

THE LAW OF DIMINISHING RETURNS. The corporate world understands incremental value. It is an expectation that the return on an investment will be greater than the costs involved. It is also an idea defined in economics as the "Law of Diminishing Returns"⁵ and is key to an understanding of practical leadership. In a "user friendly" example, it can be illustrated through the discussion of a wet towel. The first wring of the towel easily yields water, the second wring provides less and so on and so forth. The energy expended, the cost, as we squeeze harder than before increases, while the amount of water quickly lessens. Soon it becomes unprofitable to continue: the cost is greater than the gain. The application of that law in decision making is seen as you "fine tune" an issue over time. You will spend an increasingly greater amount of effort for those last drops of perfection.

TIME VALUE. Time is a precious resource which increasingly reveals its value as we use it up.⁶ The 20/80 rule recognizes the importance of time as the leader's most critical resource. The more he fine tunes an issue or tries to gather additional information, the more time he consumes. Decision making must take place within the limits of the time available. The more time you use trying to wring out that wet towel, the less time there is for making upon other decisions. Diminishing returns, coupled with the consumption of time, underscore the need for practical leadership in decision making.

OPPORTUNITY COSTS. A follow-on economic principle which comes to bear in practical leadership is that of "opportunity costs."⁷ There is a cost to every decision and that cost is felt in the opportunities you forgo in doing other things because you are focused on something else. It is directly connected to the 20/80 rule. If you do more than is needed, you will exceed the 20% effort and begin to experience increasing diminishing returns. You will have increased your overall costs because there are more and more opportunities you can not do as long as you are involved in the initial decision making process.

As you torque yourself trying to perfect a certain decision, you consume additional time, money and effort which can not be recovered. Opportunities to do other things, to make other decisions, to use your resources in other ways, disappear. Time marches on and, although you may have made a completely correct decision, you may have lost in the long run because of the inappropriate amount of effort focused on that one action. Economically speaking, the 20/80 rule is key to practical leadership.

There are other costs, too, lurking in the shadows if you should "hedge your bet" and hold out for additional information before making a decision. First, you will quickly deplete those resources of time, initiative and momentum. Additionally, you will start to lose the clarity of overall focus for a want of more details on one issue. Because of that, any concurrent actions will come into risk and the probability of making uninformed new decisions will have increased. The overriding fear of failure is sometimes shown in these decision making delays.⁸

WHEN THE EXCEPTION IS THE RULE

One of the essential things in following through with the 20/80 rule of leadership is that one needs to know when to

use it and when not to use it. There are decisions and follow-on actions which require exacting precision and override the costs we have mentioned. Precision, which demands extraordinary levels of exactness and success, is an expensive proposition. But, laser surgery, space shuttle flights and safety issues, to mention but a few, are worth the extra effort.

If I were an astronaut, the 20/80 rule would not be the best approach: it would not be a comforting feeling for me as I sat on top of a NASA rocket in its countdown phase. Nor would I feel comfortable getting ready for open heart triple bypass laser surgery based on the 20/80 rule. Likewise, strategic, long range, decisions made by leaders and impacting upon multiple nations and future generations demand near fail-safe considerations. However, despite these exceptions, the vast majority of decisions will fall within the 20/80 rule.

BOTTOM LINE

Combining the economic principles of opportunity costs, time value and diminishing returns with basic leadership traits provide us with a simple prescription to successful decision

making. Called the "20/80 rule," the process encapsulates practical leadership focused on meeting less than absolute standards of performance while maintaining realistic momentum. It is a handy rule of thumb which emphasizes the idea of "in stride" net gains in decision making. In short, it is practical leadership!

end

ENDNOTES

1. Perry M. Smith, Taking Charge: A Practical Guide For Leaders, p. 108.
2. Dandridge M. Malone, Small Unit Leadership: A Commonsense Approach, pp. 126-129.
3. U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 25-100, Training The Force, pp. 1-5.
4. U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 22-103, Leadership and Command at Senior Levels, p. 82.
5. Paul A. Samuelson, Economics, pp. 21-25.
6. Ibid., p. 751.
7. Jim Eggert, What Is Economics?, pp. 8-10.
8. Warren Bennis, Why Leaders Can't Lead: The Unconscious Conspiracy Continues, p. 22.

NOTE: This concludes the first article of the study

CAN YOU HEAR ME, LIEUTENANT?

The Army War College has provided me with too much time to think about Operation Desert Storm. I wish I were there instead of on the side lines. Sure, I want to be there with "my team", but there is another reason. I trained many of those combat engineers; they were my responsibility and now they are there and I am here. I want to "check them out one" more time; double check the gear, the plans and conduct a quick rehearsal. To sit down with the junior leaders and have them brief back to me all we have discussed over the years; to sit down with the newest of the leaders and go over essential leadership traits. I want to talk with each of the warriors; most of all, I need to share my thoughts with the platoon leader. But the best I can do now is to send them a note. Can you hear me, Lieutenant?

"Why should I read this?" That is a legitimate question. Your time is very valuable. You have a whole platoon of challenges awaiting. You have things to do, places to go and people to see. As a lieutenant in the United States Army you

have been trained and tested repeatedly: now its time to take charge. You are right, but I still ask you to read these words and capture the spirit contained within them.

But, to your question, "Why?" First, what I have to say concerns soldiers and you are the caretaker of these sons and daughters of America. It is the most awesome of responsibilities: far greater than anything you have done before. Hear my words so you will do better than I. A young officer came up to a great soldier and asked that proven warrior how he became such a great leader. The general looked at the soldier and replied, "That is easy, two words sum it all -- 'right decisions'." The soldier thought about that and then asked, "How do you make right decisions?" The leader replied, "Easy, one word sums it up quite nicely -- 'experience'." The young soldier thought about that and then asked, "But how does one get that type of experience?" The general smiled and said, "Two words -- 'wrong decisions'." I will tell you, though, that there is not enough time for you to personally experience it all. If you are to be the leader we expect of you, then the experience, the "wrong decisions" the general was talking about, must come from others as well as yourself. Listen and learn from my mistakes and experiences.

The other reason why you should read on is more pragmatic. The Army is about to begin a major "build down." The majority of ROTC cadets, even those with scholarships, will not be allowed to enter active service. Many young officers presently on active duty with positive mission accomplishments to their credit, will be asked to leave. The cut line between who stays and who goes, will be tough.¹ It pays to listen and learn from someone who experienced four such troop reductions.

I would like to talk with you about what I expect from you as an officer, platoon leader and fellow soldier. What I am about to tell you are simple words of advice from a soldier who has taken a number of wrong turns, had some great luck, encountered all kinds of bosses, and learned from others.

There are ten soldier traits you must internalize. They must be a part of your being, each and every day. You are about to enter into a profession like no other calling. You will be given the responsibility of protecting our nation, and, on a daily basis, the well being of a priceless team of young warriors.

1. **SOLDIER CONCERN** -- Your soldiers are your 24 hours a day responsibility. This is not an 8 to 5 job; it is a

calling in the purest of senses: total commitment to your men and women and their families is your purpose.

2. SUSTAINMENT -- The "green machine" is not a perpetual one: it is fleeting in its vision and strength. You must constantly work at sustaining the excellence of your soldiers and their equipment: keeping it all together and focused for the long haul. Sustainment means dedication and selflessness, each and every day.

3. FITNESS -- Physical, mental and moral strength is what I am talking about. You, your body, mind and spirit will be asked to perform when your senses tell you to drop out, to quit. You must have the physical strength to go the extra mile, the moral fiber to maintain the battle vision and the mental clarity and agility to put it all together, day and night: not only for yourself, but for the soldiers whom you lead. "Hanging tough" is what I expect of you, and it all starts with a physically fit body. If you don't have it now, you probably won't have it later, and it is that later time you will be asked to do the near impossible. If you don't have what it takes now, I can't risk waiting too much longer for you to obtain that special spirit.

4. TRAINING -- It is a mindset. When Juma Ikangaa of Tanzania, the great marathon runner, was asked about his

world record in the New York Marathon he said, "The will to win is nothing without the will to train." Soloflex Corporation prints it on their T-shirts -- "No Pain, No Gain." You must live, eat and breath a training experience mentality. All you do must be training related; the focus must be so, for when we are called, the nation expects us to be trained. There will no longer be a time to train, but to execute.

5. **SAFETY** -- Goes hand-in-glove with training. All actions involving your soldiers must consider safety. It is the essence of true soldier concern. You must understand and practice risk analysis which leads to the reduction of the inherent dangers found within realistic training. Do not assume anything when it comes to safety.

6. **SOLDIER RECOGNITION AND RETENTION** -- Are essential within our calling. We must always be in tune with our soldiers and recognize them for their actions -- both the good and the bad. A hand written note performs miracles. It shows that you really do care by walking the extra distance of a "thanks" or a "get with it," not only to the soldier, but to the spouse or parents. Give them the self-worth and feedback they deserve and seek. That leads to soldier retention. Retention is your duty and it starts on day one

when you welcome the troop into the unit. We recruit the individual, but we retain the soldier and his family. Remember that!

7. RESPONSIBILITY, AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY -- It is, in leadership terms, the "powering down" to the lowest level which can successfully accomplish the mission. If its a squad's job, then give the torch to the squad leader. You power down to the mission, giving that soldier the responsibility and authority to do it; don't forget the third part of this tenet -- accountability. Make sure that everyone knows that with powering down comes accountability for one's actions.

8. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT -- Is expected of you from the get go. You are in the profession of arms and must maintain proficiency and competency in your calling. This does not mean that you immediately enroll in night classes for an MBA; rather, it means you focus in on your military growth and the growth of your soldiers.

9. BATTLE FOCUS -- It is critical that you understand and maintain a clear and present battle focus in all you do. Successful deterrence comes from a persistent, full-court press type of battlefield awareness. That is hard to do. It means that you understand what this calling is about, you

have taken your oath seriously and, no matter what external factors may impact upon you, you will keep yourself and your soldiers locked-in on target, every single day.

10. Finally, there is LEADERSHIP -- Leaders are made, not born; they are developed through themselves and others.²

"Operation Desert Storm" will be seen as a success or a failure depending on the actions of the front line, troop level, leaders. Proper leadership is done in three phases -- you listen, learn and then lead. Listen, learn and lead -- in that order. Change it around and you have a mess. You must listen before you can learn and you must learn before you can lead. "Leaders follow" is a simple, yet complex, old saying. It means that leaders follow-up, follow-through, and follow the lead. When I came into the Army, "manager" was a bad word. The Army only had leaders, not managers. Of course, that was one of the major problems with the Army since, in reality, each officer must be both a manager and a leader. A manager focuses on sustainment; he is concerned with the efficient running of the organization. The leader, though, is more focused on the forward movement of the organization; he is concerned with mission accomplishment. Leadership, true leadership, demands both.³

These ten tenets are your foundations. Each one critical in

itself; but all can be rolled up for you, the professional soldier, into three basic traits -- CARING, STANDARDS, and READINESS.

When it comes to caring there are three questions one must ask oneself about each of his soldiers: "Who is he?, How is he?, and Where is he?" Caring is not being soft; its being firm. The first soldier to die during "Operation Just Cause" was one of mine. A great soldier who I cared for very much, but maybe not enough. The Panama crisis was developing when this soldier asked for time off. We were totally wrapped up in getting the division and ourselves ready for anything and no one was allowed to go on leave, but we said "yes" to this fine soldier. Then "Just Cause" started and our initial mission was to outload the division, and we forgot about the soldier; we stopped caring for him for a few days. The first soldier to die was shot with a .357 magnum to the head; the bullet entered and never exited his skull. They say it was a lover's quarrel. It happened just outside our post. Caring is a full time mission for each of us.

"Who is he?" -- his background, desires, needs, loved ones. More than just a name, he is a soldier you have been

entrusted to train, lead and care for. It is a simple question but carries an enormous responsibility in its execution.

"How is he?" -- his feelings, emotions, his health, fitness -- physical, moral and mental; and his family as a part of him. How is he now, today, not last week or last month when you sat down with him or quizzed him in passing. "How is he?" is a thermostat type of question, requiring constant checking on the part of the leader.

And then there is the question of "Where is he?" --not just his physical presence, but his mental whereabouts, his outlook, as well as his educational -- military and civil-- proficiency. Where does he stand in his life goals and expectations?: has he placed himself in a "no win" box as many young people do? -- you are the leader; care for that soldier.

It is important to ask these three questions about each of your soldiers. Soldiers make up the fighting team and it is the team that accomplishes the mission.⁴ If any soldier is not focused on the mission has mentally drifted off, does not understand the job or is incapable of performing it, the whole team is placed at risk. Caring is why I kicked soldiers out of the Army for taking drugs. Caring is why I

called up parents; visited sick children; dug deep into my pocket; and was a "hard ass" when we trained.

The second trait is that of standards. Without standards one has a mob. My thoughts are very simple and clear on this point. Standards must be stated, understood and enforced. No breaks. If a soldier, moreover a leader, walks by a substandard act and does not correct that act, that soldier, that leader, has lowered his standards. It is very important to understand that standards apply to the individual and to others at the same time.

My first unit assignment was that of First Platoon, B Company, 10th Engineer Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division, in Bad Kissingen, Germany. My introduction was by way of the company commander who wished me luck. It seemed my the platoon decided to quit. There had been an accident in which a squad APC had rolled over, killing three soldiers. The situation in which I was not really one of a platoon sitting down, although that is exactly what was going on. Rather, it was a case where the leadership had quit. They failed to maintain standards. They failed to enforce safety and discipline. The leadership in that company was substandard and we now had a mob rule on our hands. We changed it through the reintroduction of standards -- clear, fair, and enforced at all levels.

The other part of standards involves competition. Positive competition, the striving to be within that band of excellence, means competing against a standard and not one another. Standards, be it in goal setting or hard competition, is the base line we all must operate from.

The third, and final, trait is that of **readiness**, total combat readiness brought about through the inculcation of all ten platoon leader tenets and the two capstone traits. Readiness is what it is all about. As I explain to soldiers, picture two gunfighters going towards each other in the main town called, "Earth." When is the probability the highest, the risk the greatest, that armed conflict will start between these two gunfighters? It is when the bad guy believes that he can beat the good guy -- when, in the mind of the aggressor it is felt that the other person, nation, Army, or soldiers you lead, do not look like they are not ready. When those soldiers are not physically nor mentally capable of hanging in. When they are not prepared, show no focus nor desire, or are simply not trained. The history of our world contains numerous examples of the "gunfighter theory."

What, then, ensures peace for our Nation? It is the total

readiness of our Army. History also tells us that peace comes through strong deterrence. Your mission will be to ensure that that strength, commitment, steel-like moral fiber and exacting warrior excellence are present.

Readiness, on a daily basis, gives us peace. Have no doubt that you and your soldiers are evaluated everyday. It is no accident that there is a Soviet satellite permanently over the National Training Center; that the Soviet embassy in DC has more directional antennas than any other building in the area, and that third world countries read more about us than we read about ourselves and them.

Commitment to total readiness is needed everyday, in everything we do. It must be a positive type of vigilance and concentration, though -- a "Can Do" spirit. In 1978, tight rope artist, Karl Wallenda, prepared for months to do his most difficult act.⁵ His whole life focused on walking the tight rope across two buildings in downtown San Juan, Puerto Rico. His entire focus was on not falling. Management books now talk about the "Wallenda Theory." You see, Karl Wallenda fell to his death because he failed to have a positive focus. Although he was great, his vision was negative. Readiness must include a positive warrior spirit which you instill in your soldiers through confidence and proficiency.⁶

In closing, I urge you to do your best. When a platoon leader, be a platoon leader, not a general, a staff whinnie, an executive, or a "rambo." Be a true leader of a platoon of America's finest professional peacemakers. Get totally involved with the platoon; focus on creating team oneness without any superstars; superstars cost too much. Ingrain the three concepts -- caring, standards and readiness -- into all you do. Focus on today; maintain that bold, spirited, battle vision.

There is a saying you should never forget as you start your calling -- "home is where the Army sends you." If you believe that, if you feel at home wherever you are with your soldiers; if you are home, then you will never be homesick and you will be able to accomplish, any mission, on time and on target.⁷

The Army can be seen as a massive rock in front of your path. You have the choice of deciding what the rock will be to you. It is either a frustrating blockage, preventing you from getting to the other side, or it is a stepping stone, allowing you, and your soldiers, to move up; to move up to a higher plain of accomplishments, satisfaction and service to your Nation. Carry on, warrior!

end

ENDNOTES

1. Thomas Byrne, Fact Sheet: The FY 1991 Army Budget -- An Analysis, pp. 14-20.

2. Wess Roberts, Leadership Secrets of Attila The Hun, pp. 16-22.

3. Warren Bennis, Why Leaders Can't Lead: The Unconscious Conspiracy Continues, pp. 152-159.

4. U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 22-103, Leadership and Command at Senior Levels, pp. 60-66.

5. Bennis, p. 22.

6. Michael P. W. Stone, "First Echelon of Strategic Deterrence In a Turbulent World of Diverse Threats," ARMY 1990-1991 Green Book, p. 13.

7. U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-1, The Army, p. 24.

NOTE: This concludes the second article of the study

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